

# WORLD WATCH LIST 2025

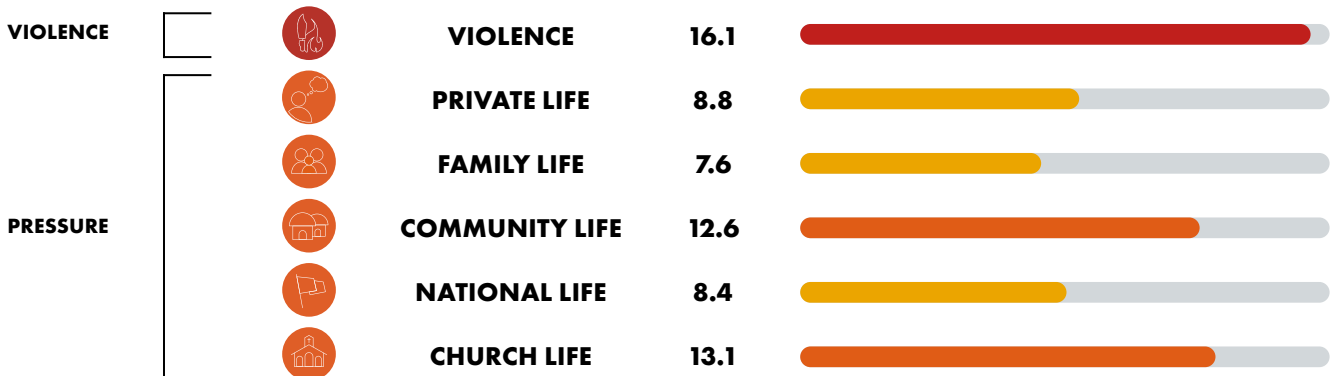
SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.  
**43**

## CAMEROON



### LEVELS OF VIOLENCE AND PRESSURE



Each of the six categories is scored out of a maximum of 16.7 points. The categories added together total 100 points (6 x 16.7 = 100).

## Key findings

The situation in Cameroon is becoming increasingly perilous for Christians, particularly in the northern regions, where radicalization is escalating among significant Muslim populations. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is fraught with extreme danger. Owning Christian literature, like Bibles, can elicit threats and even violence, forcing many converts to practice their faith clandestinely. Female converts are especially vulnerable, often subjected to coercive marriages to non-Christians. Added to the precariousness is the looming presence of Boko Haram, which disproportionately threatens Christian women with the risk of abduction.

Furthermore, church activities are being heavily disrupted, not only by Boko Haram but also by armed separatist groups and the government itself. In the North West and South West regions, these groups have been targeting communities that are predominantly Christian. As a result, churches have become collateral damage. Churches have been set on fire and church leaders and seminary students kidnapped, as corroborated by reports from the [US State Department](#). Armed groups often occupy churches, turning sacred spaces into arenas of conflict.

Moreover, the government also intimidates anyone who dares speak out against injustice, including Christians. Church leaders who voice opposition to systemic unfairness find themselves silenced, either through intimidation or more overt forms of repression like the arrest and detention of opposition party leaders, effectively stymieing any form of dissent within religious circles.

## Quick facts

### LEADER

President Paul Biya

### POPULATION

29,394,000

### NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

17,128,000<sup>1</sup>

### MAIN RELIGION

Christianity

### GOVERNMENT

Presidential Republic



## Context

Religious Context	Number of adherents	Percentage
Christians	17,128,000	58.3
Muslims	6,335,000	21.6
Ethno-religionists	5,609,000	19.1
Agnostics	172,000	0.6

Source<sup>2</sup>

Since 1982, Cameroon has been under the leadership of President Paul Biya, and the nation is sharply divided between Francophone and Anglophone regions. Particularly, the Anglophone areas—northwest and southwest—have been embroiled in a civil war since 2016. The unrest began as a protest by Anglophone professionals against their

under-representation in the central government. The government's violent response, involving torture, arbitrary detentions, and killings, escalated the situation, prompting the formation of armed separatist groups. This has led to the displacement of around half a million people and ongoing clashes between government forces and militants.

Amidst this chaos, the government's primary focus on combating separatists has created security loopholes that Boko Haram exploits, particularly in the region of Far-North (Extreme-Nord) of Cameroon. Christian communities there are vulnerable to extreme violence, with women and girls facing risks of abduction and forced marriage to fighters, along with coerced conversions to Islam. Christian men and boys are also vulnerable, especially those who are church leaders. They are at risk of being abducted, conscripted into militias, subjected to forced labor or tortured and killed.

<sup>1</sup> Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

<sup>2</sup> Data source: Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Christians are politically active but are severely hampered by the prevailing corruption and lack of democracy. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI 2023 Cameroon) ranked the country at 140 out of 180, with a meager score of 27 out of 100.

The long-standing rule of President Paul Biya, who will be 92 by the time of the scheduled 2025 presidential election, shows no signs of abating as he is expected to run for yet another term. This prospective candidacy is particularly noteworthy in the context of the ongoing crises facing the country—especially the Anglophone civil war, rampant corruption, and the deteriorating human rights situation. Biya's age and potential bid for reelection could further inflame these issues and perpetuate the status quo, offering little hope for a more democratic or transparent Cameroon. The government's persistent focus on quelling separatist movements in the Northwest and Southwest regions leaves room for security lapses, which extremist groups like Boko Haram continue to exploit, particularly affecting vulnerable Christian communities.

According to the US State Department's IRFR 2023 report on Cameroon, most Christians in the country primarily reside in the southern and western regions, with the Northwest and Southwest largely Protestant. The report also notes a burgeoning number of Christian revivalist churches in these areas.

In 2024, the challenges for the church has shown no signs of improvement. Radicalization is still on the rise, and the government has been suppressing and silencing everyone, including Christians, who speak out against injustices. Christians continue to face very high religious persecution, both from armed groups and the government, complicating the environment for the practice of their faith.

## How the situation varies by region

Governance and security in Cameroon are major problems, with the country facing violence in three regions: 1) Far North - where Boko Haram and ISWAP continue to mount attacks; 2) North West and 3) South West, which are both areas where the Anglophone insurgency is based.

## Who is affected?

### COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

This category is not included in the WWL scoring and analysis.

### HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Roman Catholics (who make up 42% of the Christian population) and some Protestant denominations have had their autonomy undermined by the government and have occasionally been affected by Boko Haram violence.

### CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

Those who convert to Christianity from Islam experience the most pressure and violence from family and community in Muslim-majority regions. Many converts therefore relocate to safer parts of the country. Those who convert from ethnic religious beliefs to Christianity also face pressure from their community, though less intensely.

### NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Baptists and Pentecostals face opposition in northern Cameroon when they evangelize or attempt to integrate Christian converts from a Muslim background into their churches. Some churches have faced threats of closure for criticizing the government.





## Main sources of persecution and discrimination

### ISLAMIC OPPRESSION

In the northern Adamawa region and some eastern regions, Islamic oppression primarily affects Christian converts, who are pressurized to return to Islam by their family and community. Militant groups such as Boko Haram pose a constant threat to life and security and have caused the displacement of many Christians, undermining the history of peaceful relations between Christians and Muslims in modern-day Cameroon.

### DICTATORIAL PARANOIA

President Paul Biya's regime has been responsible for political arrests and killings of Christians, many of whom oppose his rule. This occurs especially in the Anglophone region, due to the independence movement active in the area.

### ORGANIZED CORRUPTION AND CRIME

Cameroon is one of the most corrupt nations in the world. Corrupt officials in the north can be bribed (for example, by imams) against protecting Christians under attack by radical Islamic groups.

### CLAN OPPRESSION

A significant number of the population adhere to traditional belief systems. In areas where Christians oppose such practices, they will face rights violations.

### CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONAL PROTECTIONISM

Historical denominations do not welcome the activities of new church groups. For example, in 2018, Cameroon's Protestant, Baptist and Catholic churches called on the government to shut down a number of Pentecostal churches.



## How are men and women differently affected?

### WOMEN

Despite being a secular country, the far north region suffers from Boko Haram violence. Women and girls are abducted, forced into marriage, raped and subjected to forced labor, with several girls forced to act as suicide bombers. Female converts from African Traditional Religions or Muslim backgrounds are pressured by families and communities. Often dependent on husbands or fathers, they are put under house arrest or forcibly married to a non-Christian. Married converts face divorce, loss of child custody, and disinheritance.

#### Female typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Denied access to social community/networks
- Denied custody of children
- Denied inheritance or possessions
- Discrimination/harassment via education
- Enforced religious dress code
- Forced divorce
- Forced marriage
- Forced out of home – expulsion
- Incarceration by family (house arrest)
- Violence – death
- Violence – sexual

### MEN

Boko Haram poses a major threat to Christian men and boys, particularly church leaders, in the northern regions. Men have been abducted, used for forced labor, tortured and forcibly recruited by militias. Conflict in the Anglophone region has also fueled instability and caused many, including Christians, to flee. Christians also face discrimination in job opportunities, boycotting businesses, and harassment from government officials when they oppose corruption. This affects Christian families economically, financially and psychologically. Male converts to Christianity are pressured by their families and communities, often rejected and denied inheritance.

#### Male typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Denied inheritance or possessions
- Economic harassment via business/job/work access
- Forced to flee town/country
- Imprisonment by government
- Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
- Violence – death
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – verbal

## WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2025	43	67
2024	43	66
2023	45	65
2022	44	65
2021	42	64

The overall pressure on Christians averaged 10.1 points across the five spheres of life (a rise of 0.1 compared to WWL 2024), with the most significant challenges appearing in the Church and Community spheres. Violence levels remained extremely high, with a slight increase to 16.1 points from 15.9 in WWL 2024. For the past five years, Cameroon has consistently scored 64 points or above, reflecting sustained pressure and violence against Christian communities. Persistent Boko Haram activity in the north continued to pose a severe threat, while civil conflict in the west forced churches to pay “protection money” to separatists, who also restricted any criticism of their actions. Governmental restrictions further compounded these difficulties, with authorities prohibiting Christian leaders from speaking out against human rights abuses and corruption. Widespread corruption weakened security and the rule of law in many areas. Additionally, established church denominations persecuted other Christian groups, seeing the growth of non-traditional Christian communities as a potential threat. These combined pressures create a complex and challenging environment for Christians across Cameroon.

## Examples of violence in the reporting period

- On January 27, 2024, approximately 100 Boko Haram militants attacked the village of Lambram, looted 10 Christian homes, and killed a Christian woman in her 60s.
- In the regions of Tourou, Ldoubam-Bas and Lambram, repeated Boko Haram assaults have forced over 1,000 residents to flee their homes to escape violence and destruction.

WWL Year	Christians killed	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians internally displaced
2025	100*	100*	1000*
2024	24	53	1000*

This table includes only a few categories of faith-based violence during the reporting period - for full results see the violence section of the country’s corresponding WWL Persecution Dynamics. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10\*, 100\* or 1000\*) is given which in reality could be significantly higher. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000\*, 100,000\* and 1,000,000\*.





### PRIVATE LIFE

Christian converts from a Muslim background often hide their new faith. Gathering is very risky, as is owning a Bible or Christian literature.

### FAMILY LIFE

In the case of marital separation, Christian converts from a Muslim background have been denied the right to claim custody of children if their former spouse is Muslim. This particularly affects women in the country's north. Inheritance rights can also be lost after conversion. In several instances, married female converts had to choose between their husband and their faith, leading to forced divorce.

### COMMUNITY LIFE

Christian converts from Islam are harassed and threatened by their communities in remote areas of the north. They are discriminated against in education and employment and are

closely watched by government intelligence agents, which leads to self-censorship.

### NATIONAL LIFE

Freedom of expression is restricted since the government is sensitive to perceived or actual criticism. This can lead to internet shutdowns and arrests. In the north especially, security and armed forces have not been punished when they have arbitrarily arrested, tortured or killed civilians.

### CHURCH LIFE

Clashes between the government's armed forces and separatists have disrupted Christian activities in the Anglophone provinces. It is difficult for new churches to register with the government. Many operate without registration and are rarely punished. However, lack of registration can be used to threaten a church with closure whenever the government feels the church in question has not supported it politically.



# International obligations & rights violated

**Cameroon has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights under the following international treaties:**

1. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
2. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
3. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)
4. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
5. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

**Cameroon is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:**

- Christians are killed for their faith (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Christian converts face coercion, violence, and harassment, including the loss of a job or opportunities for further education unless they renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18, ICESCR Art. 2)
- Peaceful Christian religious gatherings are restricted by Boko Haram, security restrictions and denial of registrations or meeting permits (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 21)
- Christians face discrimination in the public and private workforce (ICCPR Art. 18, ICESCR Art. 2)
- For a fear of reprisals due to a lack of security, Christians are denied their right to freedom of expression (ICCPR Art. 19)
- Christian women are forcibly married and forced to recant their beliefs (ICCPR Art. 23 and CEDAW Art. 16)

## Situation of other religious minorities

Any religious groups that do not openly support the government face violations. In areas where Christians are the majority, Muslims are ostracized because the community sees them as likely Boko Haram sympathizers.





## Open Doors in Cameroon

Open Doors has served the Church in Cameroon for many years with persecution awareness seminars. From 2008, with the help of local churches and partners, our focus has been on finding and equipping the persecuted Church. Our vision is for a holistically strong Church that knows how to biblically respond to persecution and care for new believers and the traumatized in the community. We aim to achieve this through:

- Persecution and crisis relief, and trauma care
- Economic empowerment and care (spiritual and physical) for new believers
- Spiritual and socio-economic care to new believers and persecuted believers





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## ABOUT THIS BRIEF

- The content of this document is based on the more detailed WWL Persecution Dynamics per country published annually by World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2025 Open Doors International.
- All brief country profiles can be accessed under 'Advocacy resources' on the research pages of the Open Doors International website, along with the WWL Persecution Dynamics per country, accompanying Background Information per country and the latest update of WWL Methodology. These are also available at the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).
- The WWL 2025 reporting period was 01 October 2023 – 30 September 2024.

*Many photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.*